

# Resistance through Re-presenting Culture: Aboriginal Student Filmmakers and a Participatory Action Research Project on Health and Wellness

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This article focuses on a participatory research project designed to promote student use of digital video to explore conceptions of health and wellness. We have viewed aspects of student resistance through the cultural perspectives that guide the Aboriginal education programs involved with the study. In presenting this piece, we have experimented with a number of different styles to represent the different cultural, ethical, and educational dimensions of the research project and to advance a form of resistance to standardized representations of research results. Through video re-presentation of culture, students resisted the privileging of text and dominant cultural constructions of their personal identities.

Key words: digital video, First Nations education, multiple literacies, health education, community and university partnerships

Cet article porte sur un projet de recherche collectif visant à promouvoir l'utilisation de la vidéo numérique chez les élèves en vue d'explorer diverses conceptions de la santé et du bien-être. Les auteurs analysent certains aspects de la résistance des élèves à travers les perspectives culturelles qui orientent les programmes d'enseignement à l'intention des autochtones compris dans l'étude. Dans leur recherche, les auteurs ont fait appel à différents styles de représentation des diverses dimensions culturelles, éthiques et pédagogiques de l'étude et ont promu une forme de résistance aux représentations traditionnelles des résultats de recherche. À travers la re-présentation vidéo de la culture, les élèves ont refusé d'accorder une place privilégiée au texte et aux constructions culturelles dominantes de leurs identités personnelles.

Mots clés : vidéo numérique, enseignement dispensé aux autochtones, littératies multiples, éducation en matière de santé, partenariat entre la communauté et l'université.

In the broad context and network of relationships that constitute public education, resistance can take many forms. It may take the form of student resistance to adult authority (in the school system) and how adults perceive students, or of teachers struggling to maintain an ethos of care in a system designed around a metaphor of industrial production and ranked outputs. Resistance can also take the form of alternative programs designed to provide a safe place for teachers and students whose histories lie outside those of the dominant culture. It can be found in approaches to teaching, learning, and research that seek an alternative to positivist paradigms of knowledge production that privilege text as a medium of communication.

As a system designed for the transmission of culture, public education provides a rich site for contestation and struggle, especially for those whose backgrounds and aspirations are positioned outside those of mainstream society. In this article we highlight some of the forms and contexts of resistance that have emerged in a participatory research project we have engaged in over the past four years.

#### WHO IS SPEAKING HERE?

In presenting this article, we use the word “we” to describe a collective voice that represents a range of individuals occupying a variety of different roles. The challenge for us in creating this multi-vocal piece is accurately conveying the differing perspectives, experiences, challenges, and understandings that have emerged over the course of this project for the student participants, and for us, as individuals. As a research and writing team, we are a mixed group: four Aboriginals and five non-Aboriginals, and among the occupational roles we hold are teachers, professors, graduate students, research assistants, and program developer. Some of these roles overlap, and all blended together when we worked on this project. We are from Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw, Shuswap, Dene, Euro-American, and Euro-Canadian heritages, with all but one of us living in an urban context in Western Canada. We are also parents, family members, and community activists living in diverse circumstances.

In this article we experiment with form and voice, borrowing from the conventions of script writing, combining historical and personal

narrative, fiction, expository text, and academic writing. Using a mixture of styles and structures is in itself a form of resistance. In several ways, this piece reflects our own resistance to reducing a complex project to a standard article format that glosses over much of the difference and detail embodied in the project. We have struggled with how to present this project to an academic audience, and elsewhere have written about the ethics of voice as it relates to representing research participants (Riecken, Strong-Wilson, Conibear, Michel, & Riecken, 2005). Ideally, this article would take shape not as it is required for publication – a systematic, linear representation of written words, but somehow as a living, breathing portrayal that articulates the reality we experienced within the research project.

Because of this, we have used several different conventions to structure this piece and explore these different manifestations of resistance. As a way of highlighting classroom research experiences, we have used fictionalized conversations, a kind of scripted “dataplay” (O’Riley, 2003) that is grounded in our own research and teaching experiences. These “ethnographic fictions” (Van Maanan, 1988), identifiable as italicized text, serve to supplement and background the ideas in the various sections. The dataplays or “playlets” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul 1997) are intended to give the reader a sense of the actual classroom and research environments. They are drawn from a combination of direct quotations from interviews and student videos, paraphrasing of interviews, recollections of situations and conversations, conversations that might or could have happened, and field notes. They represent the essence of the reality and practical issues that educators, researchers, and participants encounter daily. It is also another way to include the student participants in the overall research process and writing.

Included in the piece are the voices of the student filmmakers and some of the people they interviewed for their productions. Through this interpretive “pastiche” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), in which we combined multiple methodologies for representing what we had learned, we hope to present readers with a representation that is both textual and filmic thereby moving beyond the limitations of standard text-based structures for recounting the processes and outcomes of participatory research. In

an analogue to the filmmaking technique of compositing used by the student filmmakers in which one combines layers of video imagery, text, and sound to produce a video narrative, we juxtaposed dataplays, researchers' and teachers' perspectives, student interviews, and academic references to produce a piece that is not only heteroglossic (Bahktin, 1981), but representative of the different cultural, historical, and occupational orientations we bring to our work as a project team.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Traditional Pathways to Health (TPTH) is a participatory research project intended to address issues of health and wellness among Aboriginal youth. Developed in partnership with the teachers who are co-authors of this article, the project, funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, makes use of digital video as a tool for developing youths' understandings of health and wellness. Students in three different programs run by Corrine Michel, Frank Conibear, and John Lyall partnered with a research team from the University of Victoria to learn not only the techniques of digital video production, but also the basic ethical and methodological structures of interpretive research. Classroom diversity is broad with nine different First Nations represented across three separate program sites designed to address First Nations education. Students, as co-researchers, chose a health topic or issue that interested them. They then planned, researched, and developed a video with their message that they presented to their community to share what they had learned. Now in its fourth year, over 30 student videos have been produced, covering a variety of health related issues including smoking, drug use and addictions, drinking and driving, suicide, diabetes, the protective effects of culture, cultural dancing, language, healthy lifestyles, participation in sports, racism and discrimination, healing circles, traditional foods and medicines, cultural understandings, and relationships. While working on their projects over the course of a school term, students engaged in a variety of activities beginning with identifying a focus for their research project. They then formulated a research question that guided their inquiry. As part of the data gathering process for their project, students could search for information on the Internet, interview family and community members,

or conduct library research. In addition to gathering the raw material for their videos, the students learned the skill sets for digital camera use and computer-based video editing, thus increasing their technological capacity.

Each program operated slightly differently within the provincial school system to support students whose needs were not being met in the mainstream system. First Nations communities, school communities, and the wider community have developed these programs as part of an effort to increase the opportunities and chances for academic success of urban Aboriginal students. All three programs have similar goals and philosophies that in many ways relate to resistance within education.

Careers and Personal Planning (CAPP) at Victoria High School has a course option for Aboriginal students that focuses on making connections with Elders and other Aboriginal role models in the community to facilitate their career planning. The WestShore Center for Learning and Training has developed a separate First Nations graduation program that assists adult and youth learners. A strong cultural focus engages students in many activities and relationships with Aboriginal artists, poets, dancers, and writers. Provincially required courses are taught in a supportive setting through relationships developed and built on trust and respect. In First Nations Leadership 11 at Esquimalt Secondary School, the philosophy of the course is rooted in the conviction that students are capable of learning, deserving of respect, and are leaders in their communities. It embraces the understanding that First Nations values and beliefs are essential to the understanding of self and others as leaders.

Resistance, as it is used in this article, means several things. The classroom programs we operate within are based in Aboriginal pedagogies that resist colonial styles of education. The act of utilizing video as a form of literacy to develop culturally grounded conceptions of health and wellness resists typical curriculum methodology. Using a participatory model of research lays a foundation and creates space for counter-narratives that resist the predominant positivistic models of health research as well as western definitions of health.

## ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

*Teacher: Today, I'd like to welcome our guests from the university to the circle. They're here to talk to you about doing a video research project on health and wellness. Welcome.*

*Researcher: Thank you.*

*Student: (Standing and crossing the circle to shake the researcher's hand) Welcome.*

*Researcher: Thank you for welcoming us to your circle and your classroom. As your teacher has told you, we'd like to invite you to join us in doing a participatory action research project.*

*Student: Say that again?*

*Researcher: A project that you all participate in by choosing your own topics and researching them. The project is called Traditional Pathways to Health and one of its objectives is to involve students and youth in doing their own research about health and wellness using digital video.*

*Student: Video? We get to make movies?*

*Researcher: If you'd like to, yes. You'll need to agree and sign a consent form that indicates you understand what the project is about and how the research is to be used as well as how it will benefit the community.*

*Student: Which community?*

*Teacher: Your community and maybe the school community too.*

*Researcher: We have the forms with us and we'd like to go through them with you if you are interested. This is what we call informed consent. It's something that you will need to do with anyone you ask to be in your videos too. People want to know what you're going to do with the video you're making, especially if they're going to be in it. A lot of this is really about building relationships and trust.*

The ethical dimensions of a project such as this one are many and complex. Although the preceding datatray illustrates the ethical guidelines of informed consent that the university researchers are obliged to follow, we need also to highlight the parallel guidelines and protocols that are in place within the communities in which we worked. The Aboriginal teachers who are part of our team are keenly aware of the multiple roles they must play as they simultaneously represent cultural, institutional, pedagogical, and personal interests that can conflict with

one another. Wearing multiple hats is not easily done and elsewhere we have written about the challenges presented by these “layers of consent” as they exist in this project (Riecken & Strong-Wilson, 2006). Over the life of this project we have learned some important lessons about the blending of university and Aboriginal protocols regarding research ethics.

For instance, the issue of ownership of the videos arose very quickly during the first year of the project. Within each of the communities in which we worked, there are well-established cultural protocols around the protection and preservation of Aboriginal knowledge. In several instances, before Elders would agree to share their knowledge with student filmmakers, or indicate a willingness to appear in their video, they asked important questions about ownership, control, and access to the final video product. For this project, we took the stance that the student filmmakers were the owners of the work they created. Ownership of cultural property and knowledge is retained within the community, and the students have authority over the dissemination of their work.

Adhering to this stance has been problematic at times, but we believe that it has enriched the project and strengthened our relationships with the communities. In terms of the dissemination of the project’s findings, when the project team made a public presentation that included showing a student video, whenever possible, we included the student filmmaker as a co-presenter so they could speak to the content and meaning of their message. Student co-presenters were compensated for their time at presentations with a small stipend or honorarium. If we were not able to have the students co-present with us, as a minimum, we sought their permission before presenting their work. This approach to ownership, control, and access represents a blending of the interests of the academic community (i.e., knowledge production and knowledge transfer) with the interests of the students as members of their Aboriginal community (i.e., protection, preservation, and control of cultural knowledge). This blending of interests is counter-hegemonic in the way it addresses both research ethics and the different cultural interests associated with knowledge production and use.

As researchers, we also worked from an ethical perspective that strives to encapsulate the social norms of the youth and teachers with whom we collaborated. For example, students were instructed by the research team in a way that was deliberately non-intrusive by using language that asked and did not tell students what to do within the project. Aboriginal conceptions of ethical conduct can differ from Eurocentric conceptions; however, research that includes the incorporation of Native ethics, such as the ethic of Non-Interference, allows for the development of a spiritual/cultural groundwork for ethical duties (Piquemal, 2001).

Ibrahim (1985) and McCormick (1997) have suggested that researchers must understand the beliefs and worldviews, including the ethics, of a cultural community prior to engaging in a meaningful exchange with its members. Further, lack of understanding Aboriginal beliefs, values, and ethics could result in erroneous assumptions in research practices (Herring, 1999). At the onset of each project, we entered the talking circles of the students, in keeping with the cultural practices of each specific classroom. Initially, we took on the role of visitors in the circles, and then moved to a role as classroom members through continued and consistent participation in culturally based group activities. Cross-cultural research in an Aboriginal context ought to begin with an exploration of the natural communication and ethical styles of a culture before utilizing theories or approaches for members of that culture (Minor, 1992).

Collaboration with community members, such as the classroom teachers/co-researchers, who consulted regularly with local Elders regarding the project, was ongoing throughout the research process. This form of community control over research was acknowledged by the student co-researchers as critical to our ethical research design and methodology (Batten, 2003). Ethical research practices with Indigenous peoples requires Elder input, must be marked by community control, and should produce outcomes that benefit the community, such as the transfer of technological skills (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001; Piquemal, 2001; Stubben, 2001). Through the processes of community consultation via the teachers, along with the project's protocols of student ownership, control, and access to their videos, we attempted to



ensure that the practices described by Hudson and Taylor-Henley, Piquemal and Stubben were enacted within this project.

#### CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES OF RESISTANCE

*Student: Do we have to do this?*

*Researcher: No, of course not. Your participation in the project is completely voluntary.*

*Teacher: Do you want to pass the course? (grins)*

*Student: Well...,*

*Teacher: What is it that you're not sure about?*

*Student: I don't know. Do we have to do it?*

*Teacher: You don't have to do it as part of the research project with the university, but you do have to do a research project for the course. If you really don't want to learn how to make a video, you may do a written research paper instead.*

We had to rely on the classroom teacher's experience and judgment to discern if this was a student resisting the assignment because it appeared too difficult or because they were scared. The youth, like many of us, feared being in front of a camera or of approaching participants to record on camera. Students sometimes also did not think they had any worthy ideas on health and wellness or prevention of injury.

As educators, we know this is a process that involves much individual encouragement and conversation. It takes time to allow a good idea to evolve. You have to create a direction. Sometimes this feels like a form of coercion. The classroom teacher will say to the students: to get through this course you need to complete this project. At that point, she or he may suggest a topic based upon what students stated as personal interests in past classes or conversations. The coercion is part of being a teacher, but it conflicts with the ethical protocols of voluntary participation that a researcher must follow. The teacher is closer to the students than the university facilitators, and can get a longer term read on student interests. Frank Conibear states:

For me as a teacher, it is hard-line support. In a collaborative approach, if the participants don't really want to do it, they don't do it. I am giving them a

challenging project, one through which they can say something as an individual and they can make a difference in their community. As a facilitator, I still provide the opportunity not to do the research if they are in any way uncomfortable with it. But as a teacher, I then inform them that they have to come up with a project similar in scope and size. So far, the students have taken up the challenge. (personal communication, December 17, 2004)

*Teacher: As you know, one of our projects this term is to do a video about health and wellness. Can anybody tell me why that topic is important for First Nations people?*

*Student: Suicide.*

*Teacher: Yeah, First Nations people have more suicides than the non-native population in Canada. Why is that?*

*Student: Rough life.*

*Teacher: People have had rough lives, yeah. Why is that?*

*(The class continues on their discussion and brainstorming ideas about health and wellness.)*

*Student: Is this what we have to do a video on?*

*Researcher: They're ideas that you might want to consider. What interests you?*

*Teacher: You need to have a personal connection with your topic so it's your choice. How are you going to make a difference? With **your** video?*

*Student: Something close to my heart.*

Critical social theorists encourage educators to “forge a language of transcendence” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 15) with youth so they can resist and move beyond dominant discourses that hinder their ability to speak and act in ways that are true to themselves. Giroux (1998), a critical educational scholar, points out that:

Educationally and politically, young people need to be given the opportunity to narrate themselves, to speak from the actual places where their experiences and daily lives are shaped and mediated.... Educators and others need to recognize the importance of providing opportunities for kids to voice their concerns, but equally important is the need to provide the conditions – institutional, economic, spiritual, and cultural – that will allow them to reconceptualize themselves as citizens and develop a sense of what it means to fight for important social and political issues that affect their lives, bodies, and society. (p. 31)

Video is a language of transcendence for many of the student participants because it allows them to express their personal experience of reality with a depth and clarity that often is not possible for them in a written format. In a post-project interview with one of the student filmmakers, Augie described how making his film allowed him to learn more about himself.

It definitely is different from all the other projects that I've done. It really helped me do a lot of digging on my emotions.... What it [research] means to me is doing deep digging from here, in here (points to chest), in your heart and it helps you learn more about yourself, and the experience of how you feel, of what you do, from here (points to chest again).... It means doing a lot of deep digging and learning how to express yourself more. (Individual interview excerpt, Augie)

For Gary, another student filmmaker, a link developed between what he learned from doing the project and having that knowledge in a visceral sense of knowing. For his video, Gary asked his elders about the meaning of health and wellness and what message they would like to give to young people today. In turn, we asked Gary about his learning.

The most important thing I've learned from this project is to live a good life. No matter what anybody says, I'll do what I want, and if it's good then I don't need anybody else's consent.

Interviewer: How do you know if something is good?

Gary: You can feel it. Feel it inside, you know it's good.

(Individual interview excerpt, Gary)

Becoming familiar with the video process also promotes critical thinking about the indoctrinating qualities of the media and the use of video as a valid alternative literacy (Selber, 2004). The New London Group (1996) writes about expanding the notion of literacy to include a multiplicity of discourses. Specifically, they take into account the context of cultural and linguistic diversity found in society today as well as the increasing variety of text forms brought about by the digital era associated with information and multimedia technologies. In developing their idea, the authors define different design elements used in the meaning-making process and put into pedagogical practice, leading to a broader vision of what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century.

*New Administrator: Why do you use video in this project?*

*Teacher: In our program, we work with the whole child and recognize that there are many facets to consider in the education of our students. They don't all learn the same way and using video is a way for students to express their thoughts and ideas, it's a form of literacy. Producing video is like writing, and watching video is like reading.*

*Student: And it's way more fun!*

*New Administrator: But how is that teaching them to be literate? Sure, they need to learn about technology – the Information Technology teachers do that. You need to get these students reading and writing!*

*Teacher: Using video as a research tool also allows students to find out about things you can't find in books or texts. They have access to perspectives that aren't represented in the formal education system.*

*New Administrator: They need to be learning what's in the curriculum so they can be successful.*

*Teacher: They are learning! And they are proud of what they are learning as well as who they are learning from. This is a way that students can acknowledge and be acknowledged by their families, their communities, and their culture. It's a way for them to both be creative and to contribute. Look around you – the students are engaged and working hard at putting together their videos, with their messages about health, wellness, and injury prevention for youth.*

The creation of personal videos becomes a powerful resistance to the many forces that negatively influence health and allows student participants to acknowledge the reality of their present situation as well as actively look to the future in health affirming ways. Goldfarb (2002) has described how videos that students and teachers collaboratively produced and owned can develop students' abilities to critique media representations of race, class, and culture, while simultaneously advancing visual pedagogy as an important adjunct to learning. Similarly, in their book *Postmodern Education*, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) have argued for a relevant curriculum in which "[s]tudents would make videos that express their own ideas, writing the scripts, producing the documentaries, learning how to write and perform the music, and so forth" (p. 183).

In his review of critical media theory of the late twentieth century, Goldfarb (2002) noted that the emergence of low-cost video production technologies has allowed students to shift from appropriating (and reclaiming) media through critical analysis to a more active mode of appropriation via the actual production of media itself. "By producing media texts themselves, students learn there is an alternative to resisting interpellation through mainstream media, or critical reading alone. They can appropriate the means of production to produce new sorts of meanings" (p. 69). Thus, teachers who work with students, helping them become active producers of media, are moving them beyond the typical media education strategies of "arming students against media messages with writing and speech as the weapons of choice" (p. 66). In the case of the students in the Traditional Pathways to Health Project, critical awareness of media representations developed through the creation of the videos themselves.

Video is a medium for connecting ideas with messages. The processes involved for the student filmmakers in the development and creation of video in this project included brainstorming activities, planning interviews, orientation to camera equipment, capturing video, analyzing and editing footage into the final piece, planning a presentation venue, presenting the final video, receiving feedback, and reflecting on the project by participating in interviews intended to help them articulate the process and the reasons for their choices. All these processes are a means through which students acted upon their ideas through the development of critical media literacy skills.

For Jessica, being part of a team that produced a video on the role of culture in the lives of Aboriginal youth, helped her recognize the importance of culture. In an interview, she spoke about her understanding of culture and its relationship to urbanization, industrialization, and the environment.

[I have learned] how culture has an effect on society, and how it *should* have an effect on society.... What I came out with most, is how culture is really important to carry on because it gets covered up by all the media stuff and all the fancy big cities even.... I think it should always be present.... culture defines who people are.... It should be one of the first things people have on their mind. It's an important thing to remember.... Everything's about jobs, and money.... And

things shouldn't be about money I don't think. And culture, First Nations culture especially, it's not about being big and huge and having lots of money and lots of power. And this is a new age that doesn't really respect the earth at all.... And in our culture really, you give back whatever you take. End of the story. That's how it should be. [Now] we take way more than we give back. (Individual interview excerpt, Jessica)

For each of the student filmmakers, there was a dimension of the film making process that required them to "read the world," in the Freireian sense of the term (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p.8). In creating their video as a form of text, students positioned themselves and their communities within the larger context from which they drew their experiences. Through doing this, students thus read the world and many of them displayed a well developed awareness of the conditions of their oppression as they prepared their video messages about health and wellness.

From the perspectives of emancipation and transformation, for the student filmmakers, the video making process provided not only a vehicle for communication and concrete action about specific concerns, it was also a way for them to acknowledge and promote aspects of Aboriginal culture that have a transformative effect. A dozen students made videos on the benefits that accrue from cultural engagement. Healing circles, traditional foods, cultural ceremonies and tradition, drumming and dancing groups, and athletics have all been showcased in student videos as important aspects of their culture that have a powerful positive and transformative impact upon the individuals who engage in these activities.

Through reading the world as part of an iterative process of transformation, the students not only identified areas for change and action, they also focused on the positive by acknowledging and celebrating the parts of their world that kept them healthy while developing their own identities as members of Aboriginal communities.

#### FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION AND IDENTITY

*New Administrator: So what exactly is the purpose of the First Nations leadership course?*

*Elder: Welcome.*

*New Administrator: Thank you.*

*Teacher: Yes, welcome. This course is about creating a welcoming atmosphere of respect and developing relationships.*

*New Administrator: How does leadership come into that?*

*Teacher: Leadership is quite individual. We take it in our lives; express it internally, and then externally.*

*Elder: Leadership isn't a position; it's who you are.*

The First Nations Graduation Program is an alternative, sixteen and over adult education program for Aboriginal students in the Sooke School District, located just outside Victoria. It originated three years ago as an alternative option for school-aged and adult Aboriginal students continuing or returning to their schooling. It is a small program, enrolling approximately twenty students in a district that enrolls approximately 700 Aboriginal students.

The Sooke School district is similar to the majority of school districts throughout the province with respect to Aboriginal success in the public school system. In the recent 2004 *Aboriginal Report: How are We Doing*, the BC Ministry of Aboriginal Education (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004) reported graduation rates in the Sooke School District for Aboriginal males at slightly greater than 40 per cent, while Aboriginal females were as low as 30 per cent. There are certainly a multitude of explanations for these statistics, but it is clear that Aboriginal student populations are in some nature of resistance to the provincial education system.

The First Nations Graduation Program opened its doors in September 2002 to provide Aboriginal students another educational option. Its goals are to provide a safe, caring, open, and exciting community for learning, to integrate First Nations culture, and to engage with the community through local involvement of First Nations artists, cultural instructors, and Elders. As well, its staff strive to acknowledge the emotional pain that many Aboriginal youth and communities carry. They hope that by providing such a learning environment, academic success will follow (with patience). Too often, schools start with a focus on academic success, losing students from the beginning.

The production of digital videos allowed students in these programs an avenue to communicate, to present, and share their stories. Sharing stories developed a sense of personal identity and pride in their place in the world. Students often chose topics that connected themselves to their culture or their community's way of life. Students aligned themselves with their involvement with culture or community in an approach that said "this is keeping me healthy". This is counter to producing films that focus on what is "not healthy or not well for me".

In the TPTH film, *Evolution of a People* (Dick, 2004), student filmmaker Alvin Dick queried Kwakwaka'wakw members of Alert Bay on the role that culture played in their lives.

Alvin: How has culture affected you?

K'odi Nelson: If I didn't have any cultural background, I would probably seem like I was a bit lost. So how has it affected me? I know who I am and where I come from, and this makes me proud.

Shelley Joseph: It is pretty much the base of who I am. I don't think I would have survived in this world if I didn't have my culture. It dictates the core of me, the core of my children. It dictates how I treat other people, how I conduct myself. Wherever I am, no matter where I am, who I am with, I will always be Kwakwaka'wakw. (student film maker, Alvin Dick)

The strong messages provided by these community members' participation in the video provided positive affirmations of identity for all involved. Through their participation in the students' videos, community members asserted their voice and communicated their knowledge. Students' self-affirmation through project involvement resolved into self-pride. The strength of Aboriginal people is derived from their sense of identity, of knowing who they are and where they come from. A sense of pride provides a resistance to assimilation. A resistance to assimilation by Aboriginal peoples is a testament to the multiculturalism that Canada aspires towards as a nation state.

*Researcher: Now that you've completed a video and presented it to the community, tell us how your involvement in this project has made a difference in your life.*



*Student: It brought me closer to my culture. It made me see who I am, what I am and what I stand for.*

*Researcher: What about you? You've been a partner in this project for almost four years now. Tell us what is working for you.*

*Teacher: It brings the community here. We're making a connection with the students and their communities. It's part of our philosophy. We don't exclude people. We welcome them. We're building relationships.*

*Elder: Our children need to feel welcome and a part of the school community as well as their own communities.*

*Teacher: It's not just a need for First Nations students. It's a need we all have in education, for all students – especially those who don't fit in.*

Some student videographers had an understanding of the importance of traditional teachings and how those translated into a way of being in the world. Jo-Ann Archibald (2002), an Aboriginal educator, has stated that traditional teachings foster “respect, responsibility, reverence, relationships, and reciprocity with learners” (p. 1). The First Nations teachers agreed to participate in the TPTH project because of the fit between the traditional element of respect and reciprocity that was part of the participatory action research methodology that guided the project, an opportunity to do something within the school system that felt right. But it was the students who displayed a creative form of resistance through the topics they chose. Rather than focus on disease, many of the youth chose to focus on the strength that shines through cultural and community activities. Participation in a research project that locates Indigenous teachers and learners in a place of authority is already an act of resistance. Marie Battiste (2000), another Aboriginal educator writing in Canada, describes the challenge Aboriginal learners face in schools:

In the Canadian educational system today, Aboriginal people continue to be invisible. Occasional pictures in books are the only images of participation in the educational world.... The cultural imperialistic curriculum in these schools has degraded and demoralized cultural minority students, assigned them to transitional classes, failed them, and then accused them of lacking motivation, attention, or spirit. (p. 198)

As advocated by those who position themselves as practitioners of critical pedagogy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Leonardo, 2004; McLaren, 2003), the TPTH project strove to ensure that students were representing themselves and their communities. Images of local community leaders were a powerful teaching tool, and in many instances they spoke to the resistance of their ancestors who came before them. Were it not for the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional strength of the teachings, and the willingness to take the cultural practices underground, and without their ability to adapt to rapid social and political change, an Indigenous worldview would not have persisted. Maintaining this worldview is integral to establishing a strong identity. Creating space for students to engage with their community in the production and recording of knowledge is a direct challenge to the Eurocentric educational system. Battiste (2000) writes,

The gift of modern knowledge has been the ideology of oppression, which negates the process of knowledge as a process of inquiry to explore new solutions. This ideology seeks to change the consciousness of the oppressed, not change the situation that oppressed them. (p. 198)

Visual recordings that document Indigenous epistemologies affirm for students that their view of the world is valid. It is unusual for First Nations persons to see themselves accurately represented and encouraged to actively participate in their own education in a way that has meaning to them. In many instances, what has meaning to First Nations students is connected to their family, culture, and community. This is not the norm in a dominant society that practices cognitive imperialism. Battiste (2000) explains,

Cognitive imperialism is a form of cognitive manipulation used to disclaim other knowledge bases and values. Validated through one's knowledge base and empowered through public education, it has been the means by which whole groups of people have been denied existence and have had their wealth confiscated. Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture and one frame of reference. (p. 198)

Seeing themselves, their relatives, and other First Nations people on video expressing pride in their cultural teachings, speaking their language, and making direct reference to their way of seeing the world absolutely and positively affirmed the identity of the students in the project. Students often filmed topics of cultural significance, providing an important archival tool for Aboriginal knowledge. Producing and showing the videos to a greater audience (disseminating the videos) educates and informs the public about Indigenous people. Sharing stories to promote greater understandings amongst Indigenous peoples is also important. The student participants in this project have told us it is their responsibility to share their stories. They asked “if not us, then who?” In their roles as Aboriginal filmmakers focusing on identity and community, the students are actively and effectively resisting the dominant Eurocentric public education system.

#### RESISTANCE

*Researcher 1: So have we determined what resistance is?*

*Researcher 2: Well when the **students** choose their own topic, and then make a video about it, it's a form of resistance.*

*Researcher 3: And just **making** videos is resistance.*

*Researcher 4: You mean the process of making videos?*

*Researcher3: Yes. It's resisting the dominant or regular forms of school projects and texts.*

*Researcher 4: The privileging of text.*

*Researcher 5: And public school students participating in a community partnership with the university is a form of resistance.*

*Researcher 6: The actual videos the students make are also resistance; they are both text and context as they represent the different dimensions of their world. As a kind of text, the students' videos reflect both a reading and a writing of the world.*

*Researcher 4: But is it really resistance?*

*Researcher 7: Sure it is. As they rewrite the world with their own images, they resist other's constructions of who they are.*

*Researcher 1: Gee, and I thought all we were doing was making videos!*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research described in this article was supported by a grant from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research. The authors gratefully acknowledge that support as well as that of the many community members whose knowledge and insight is an important part of the overall project. We would also like to thank Abigail Godfrey for her editorial contributions.

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